NOVA | Northern Virginia Community College

Student Internship Guide

Employer and Career Services

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What is an internship?

Internships, whether paid or not, are a proven way to gain relevant knowledge, skills, and experience in your field and assist in boosting your resume to give you an edge in today's competitive job market.

The Employer and Career Services team defines an internship as a professional learning experience, paid or not, which occurs during a set period of time and offers meaningful, practical work related to a student's field of study or career interest.

Non-Credit vs. Credit Internships at NOVA

Here at NOVA, students can complete an internship for credit, meaning students can enroll in a coordinated internship course to earn academic credit for their experience. If students are interested in this option, they should reach out to their academic department to register properly.

Students can also complete a non-credit internship, meaning they do not need to get their internship approved and cannot use it for class credit. Students can obtain these internships on their own through Career Connection.

Why Internships?

Internships can be unique learning experiences that provide students with the skills, education and practical knowledge needed to work in their industry of choice. Other benefits include:

Competitive Advantage

- Internships can give students a competitive advantage over other students who may not have participating in an internship
- Employers understand that graduates without practical experience may lack the skills required to excel on the first day of their employment

Future Employment

- Internships can directly lead to a full-time job post degree or program
- If not, it will still help students create relationships and future references with colleagues and supervisors

Identify Career Interests

- Internships allow students to explore various careers and industries to find the right fit
- Gives students an opportunity to avoid jobs in the future based on their internship experience

Networking

- Internships provide a great environment to meet professionals in the career field students want to pursue, as well as other interns who have similar interests
- Many employers will use internships as an opportunity to network and recruit students into their company or industry

Professional Experience

- Internships are the first professional experience for many students, so students learn how workplaces operate, workplace culture and employee relations
- Students also have the opportunity to gain the soft skills needed in the workplace and in leadership positions, ultimately developing themselves as a professional

What to Expect

Employer Expectations

It is important for students to understand what employers will expect from them during their internship experience. Employers will expect an eager student who is willing to learn more about their company, their industry and how their work can support their company's success.

Along with this, students should be willing to create new professional relationships with others at their company and be active in identifying areas in which they can pair their academic interests with those of the company.

Student Expectations

An internship is not a part-time job during which you are not getting paid. Here's what to expect from a typical internship:

- A meaningful internship includes only 25% or less clerical/administrative duties
- Provides a clear job/project description for the work experience
- Orients the student to the organization, its culture, and proposed assignments
- Helps the student develop and achieve learning goals
- Offers regular feedback to the intern

Searching for an Internship

How to Market Yourself

Like any career search, it is important to market yourself the best way possible for future employers. Every student has a unique path they take which leads them to NOVA and it is important to highlight the skills, experience, and education they have gained along the way.

When marketing yourself in creating a resume and/or cover letter, it is important to highlight areas in which you have experience that directly relates to the internship responsibilities. Along with this, also highlight unique skills, experience or education that can relate to the position, but also make you stand out as a candidate. Additionally, highlight any special projects, classes or positions you may have had in the past that would allow you to be successful in your internship.

Pro Tip – Employers will search for words that they included in in their job description in applicants resumes and cover letters, so be sure to add them in when building yours.

When using Career Connection, upload a professional photo to our account to allow employers to gain a proper first impression of you. It is important to also keep your information in your account up to date. Include any degrees, preferred names, a personal statement, new experiences, projects and relevant skills or organizational participation.

Internship Search Resources

Career Connection is NOVAs one stop shop for all things career planning and development. It connects employers from Northern Virginia and beyond with NOVA students and alumni to share more information regarding their companies and highlight career opportunities.

While like LinkedIn, Career Connection has employers specifically looking for NOVA students, giving students a direct connection to employers when job searching, which is something LinkedIn doesn't provide.

The Career Connection team also vets and approves each employer and job or internship that is posted to the site, ensuring that employers are legitimate, and job or internships are appropriate and meet the needs of our students.

Other resources to use when searching for an internship is a career counselor at NOVA, which is a member of the Career Services team that an provide knowledge and guidance specifically in the internship process. Career counselors can also provide guidance on career exploration, planning, and development.

Vetting an Internship Posting and Employers

It is important to find the internship that is the best option for each student, so it's also essential to properly screen employers and internship postings to ensure it is the right fit.

When searching for an internship on Career Connection, students can search by position type (paid or unpaid internships), industry, job function or by posting date.

When students find an internship that interests them, it is important to look at information such as how many hours are expected, the compensation for the position, the general position responsibilities, any professional development opportunities, and any specific application materials.

It is also helpful to search more on the employer, which can be done by clicking on the employer in Career Connection and reviewing their page. It is important to review their industry and areas of interest, their location if the position is not remote and any upcoming events they may be hosting or attending.

Preparing for an Interview

Once students have applied for an internship and been invited for an interview, it is important to properly prepare for an interview.

For interviews specific to internships, be sure to have researched the company, highlight your interests in creating a new relationship with them and how this internship and company will further your professional, education and personal development.

One way to prepare for an interview is using the Mock Interviews Tool on Career Connection, which is a feature that allows students to complete a mock interview and receive feedback all in one place. To help prepare specifically for an internship interview, there is a Mock Interview for Internships.

The module can be found under the resource tab on the left-hand side of the Career Connection homepage. It includes over 1,000 pre-recorded questions from which students may choose to build custom interviews or take pre-set interviews based on majors or type of interview. Students may also seek feedback from faculty, advisors, mentors, or colleagues to give them a better chance of acing their interviews.

So, you have an internship, what now?

Professionalism

For many students, their internship can be their first experience working in an office setting, so it is important to understand general industry expectations when it comes to professionalism in the office.

Arrive on time!

- Even if your internship is virtual, it is important to arrive on time and to be prepared for your Zoom call ahead of time.
- You don't want to be showing up late with a coffee in hand, always plan to be ready to work the minute you walk into the office or log onto your Zoom call.

Dress appropriately!

- With any job or internship, it can be hard to identify the appropriate office dress.
- Most office have a business casual dress code, which can vary by business, but can mean khakis and a nice shirt for men and a nice pair of pants and a blouse for women.
- It is important to observe the dress of other coworkers and to ask a supervisor is you have any questions.

Don't be on your phone!

- The one thing employers don't want to see is an intern scrolling through Instagram while on the job.
- It is important to show your employer that you are engaged, getting assigned tasks done and focused on what is happening in the office, not on your phone.

Communicate professionally!

- When in the office, make sure to switch from text mode to work mode when communicating with your supervisor and coworkers.
- It is important to have proper grammar, correct spelling, and a high level of formality to avoid typos or informality.
- This can also show a supervisor that you are actively working on developing yourself as a professional and care about your success in the role.

Ask questions!

- It is completely okay and expected to have questions related to workplace basics, so make sure to think of questions before you arrive on your first day.

- Examples include where to park, office dress codes, daily schedule, when and where to take lunch, etc.
- Remember – this is a learning opportunity and one of the best ways to learn is through asking questions!

Mentorship, Networking, and Professional Development Opportunities

Internships are a great opportunity for networking within your field of interest, so it is important to develop a positive relationship with your internship employer and supervisor. They are also a great opportunity to gain full time employment after completing a program, so it's also important to leave on a positive note if it's an opportunity you'd like to have in the future.

One way to indicate your interest in keeping a positive relationship and to show you are full invested in learning from the internship experience is to ask for an evaluation or feedback from a supervisor. This can be completed at the end of your internship or at various times throughout, but it gives you the opportunity to review your work, address any position goals and to as for feedback to develop a stronger professional relationship with a supervisor. This moment for evaluation or feedback can also allow a supervisor to also be a mentor for you to learn more about the company and the field in general.

As part of this feedback, we also suggest asking for a letter of recommendation when completing the internship rather than sometime after as you and your work is more relevant in the moment and the recommendation can be a bit more personal. It can also be hard to get in contact with an old supervisor months later for a recommendation for many reasons, so it is important to ask for this recommendation proactively. This can also show a supervisor or employer that you are intentionally improving yourself as a professional and value their opinion of your work.

Lastly, we suggest using an internship as an opportunity for professional develop and to identify a connection to your program or field of interest. If possible, find an internship related to your program or field of interest as the internship will only add to what you are learning in the classroom and prepare you for a career in a particular field. Many internship programs feature a professional development series or opportunities that will allow students to gather experience in addition to their internship responsibilities. It is important to take advantage of these opportunities if offered to you and if they are not offered, it is just as important to actively find them on your own or with the help of a supervisor or coworker. Some supervisors also can act as a mentor to their interns, and this is another wonderful opportunity to learn more about areas of interest and to get the most out of an internship.

Not Going as Expected?

Some internships may not turn out to be as expected, and that's okay! While this is unfortunate, it is important to take the initiative to address any concerns and ensure that the internship is successful in the end. Some examples could include not being given enough work, being given too much work, and not being properly compensated, a toxic work environment with other interns or communication concerns with a supervisor or coworker. It is crucial to address these problems as they arise rather than leaving them until the end of an internship experience.

It can be intimidating to speak with a supervisor when things may not be going well for a variety of reasons, however the Career Services team is happy to be a resource to discuss how to address the concerns. We are happy to discuss your situation and provide tips and talking points needed to address the situation with a supervisor.

For example, when discussing with a supervisor about your workload, it is important to ask to go over your internship expectations and advocate for yourself if you have too much or not enough work. It is important to approach it from the lens of wanting to be successful in your work but also not being a full-time employee, so you want to make sure you meet expectations. It is also helpful to bring concrete examples or data relating to your workload for them to full comprehend your situation. Also, remind them if it is your first professional experience and ask for additional resources or support to complete tasks.

More Resources

Career Connection

Career Connection can provide students with a wide variety of resources related to their internship search. As reminder, students can use the Mock Interviews and Resume Builder specifically regarding finding internships and preparing for an interview. Along with this, students should find career events on Career Connection to help identify employers and internship opportunities.

- **Mock Interviews –** Located under the Resources tab, the Mock Interview tool allows students to complete a mock interview using prerecorded questions specifically relating to an interview for an internship and request feedback from an advisor, faculty member or Employer and Career Services staff member.
- **Resume Builder –** Students can use the Resume Builder tool to either build a resume from scratch or using the information on their student profile! Within the Resume

Builder, students can create a resume using template for an internship position and save it to their student profile once completed.

- **Virtual Employer Lobby –** Connect NOVA students and alumni with employers through group video meetings to network and learn about career opportunities. Employers may provide information about career paths in their industry or organization and/or specific openings for jobs or internships.
- **Information Sessions –** Employers host information sessions through Career Connection to share information on their company or a specific job/internship opportunity currently open.

Career Counselors, Faculty, and Academic Departments

Outside of the Employer and Career Services Team, students can work with Career Counselors, Faculty, and their Academic Departments to discuss internships opportunities and resources.

- Career Counselors assist students with exploring, developing, and setting goals related to each student's unique educational and academic needs. Students can find the Career Counselor specific to their campus on the Career Services website.
- Faculty are a wonderful resource for students to explore their interested industry or career through relationships with employers in the area. Along with this, Faculty can help students identify additional classes or courses that could accompany their internship or areas of interest.
- Academic departments have hosted various career and professional development workshops and students should take advantage of these opportunities to learn more about career opportunities directly from their academic department.